DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 379 810 EC 303 683

AUTHOR Brogan, Bernard R.
TITLE What Will Outcome-Based Education Mean for Gifted Learners?
PUB DATE 23 Apr 94
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Pennsylvania Association of Gifted Education (King of Prussia, PA, April 23, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; *Competency Based Education; Educational Legislation; Educational Needs; Educational Objectives; *Educational Philosophy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted; Heterogeneous Grouping; Outcomes of Education; State Legislation; Strategic Planning; Student Development; *Student Educational Objectives
IDENTIFIERS *Outcome Based Education; *Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

This paper first explains outcome-based education and then considers specific questions related to serving gifted students in an outcome-based education school community, with special application to Pennsylvania. Outcome-based education is defined in terms of its emphasis on establishing learning outcomes, developing appropriate measures, and holding students and teachers accountable for achieving these outcomes. Nine ideals of successful outcome-based education are considered, including continuous and benchmark assessment, an engaging learning environment, and family involvement. Outcome-based education in Pennsylvania is discussed in terms of eight legally established goals for all students. Examples are given of the 53 student learner outcomes identified in the Pennsylvania Chapter 5 regulations. Components of the strategic plan required of every school district every 6 years are summarized. Possible concerns regarding outcome-based education and gifted students are raised. These address: (1) evidence for effectiveness of outcome-based education with gifted learners; (2) responsibility for selecting outcomes; and (3) possible consequences for gifted students of eliminating tracking and requiring all students to achieve performance standards. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 379 810

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

WHAT WILL OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION MEAN FOR GIFTED LEARNERS?

Bernard R. Brogan
Widener University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Bernard R. Brogan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper Presented at the Pennsylvania Association of Gifted Education Annual Conference, King of Prussia, Pa., April 23, 1994.

EC 303683

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

WHAT WILL OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION MEAN FOR GIFTED LEARNERS?

Bernard R. Brogan
Widener University
(610) 499-4622

INTRODUCTION

Pennsylvania's "paradigm shift" from input-oriented mandates to outcome-based performance standards may be the most significant educational reform in decades.[1] Many of the changes that will result in curriculum and instruction have important implications for gifted and talented educational programs. Because so much attention and resources are being given to these reforms, advocates for the gifted and talented must ask themselves, What will outcome-based education mean for gifted learners? This, I submit is the most important question facing friends of gifted and talented education in Pennsylvania. Although this question cannot yet be answered, I will share my thoughts on what outcome-based education *could* offer all students, including gifted learners, if it is properly planned and implemented. I believe that what outcome-based education will ultimately mean for gifted learners will depend in large measure on the informed involvement of parents, teachers, and organizations such as the Pennsylvania Association of Gifted Education. It should be understood that outcome-based education has the potential to fundamentally change the expectations we have for student learning and the methodologies we use in the practice of teaching and therefore warrants our close attention. It is important to note that many of the beliefs that are driving the outcome-based education movement have been understood and practiced by teachers of the gifted and talented for the past two decades.

A recent event at a local school district meeting underscores one of the major problems encountered in the outcomes-based education discussion. The school district was in its second year of planning for the transition to outcomes-based education and members of the planning committee met with the school board to report their progress. In the middle of the report one of the more honest school board members inquired, "What exactly do you mean by outcomes-based education?" This true story illustrates the atmosphere of confusion and misunderstanding surrounding outcome-based education. There is no question that outcome-based education will fail or falter without the full,

---

1 See Finn, Charles E.(1992, November). "The biggest reform of all." *Educational Leadership* 71, 584-592.

educated support of the members of the entire school community. Yet may stakeholders in the educational process, including many teachers and parents of gifted children, have not formulated a clear understanding of what is meant by outcome-based education.

The purposes of this session are to (1) explain and provide a rationale for outcome-based education, (2) consider specific questions related to serving the needs of the gifted in an outcome-based education school community and (3) provide a forum to discuss the issues and concerns that participants have regarding outcome-based education in Pennsylvania.

OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION DEFINED

Outcomes-based education emphasizes that the success of schools should be measured not on *what students are supposed to know*, but rather on *what students do know*. This shift from the traditional approach where the emphasis is on inputs (e.g. number of days in school) to an outcomes-based system where the emphasis is on performance standards for all students is at the core of the restructuring process. Richard Elmore[2] writes that central to this shift is a change in expectations for student learning, in the practice of teaching, and in the organization and management of public schools with an emphasis on (1) establishing what it is we want students to know and be able to do, (2) designing appropriate assessments to measure how well students are achieving these outcomes, and (3) holding students, teachers and administrators accountable for reaching these goals and expectations

One of the most important aspects of outcome-based education is that it requires that school communities renew their mission and establish clear and specific educational goals These goals defined what all high school graduates are expected to know and be able to do as a result of their schooling. As local communities engage in the task of defining educational outcomes for their students, the need for fundamental rethinking of the tradition approach to curriculum and instruction becomes apparent.

Because outcomes-based education is founded on the belief that all students can learn and whether they learn is more important than when they learn, some parents and educators have expressed the concern that achieving the purposes of outcome-based education will result in a lowering of standards and a "dummying down" of the curriculum. Although this is a legitimate concern and warrants our cautious attention, a deeper appreciation of the aim of outcome-based education reveals a strategy for raising the ceiling of expectations for all students, including the able learner.

---

2 Elmore, R. (1988). "Contested terrain: the next generation of educational reform." *A Report Prepared for the Commission on Public Administration and Leadership..*

William Spady[3] suggests four assumptions of outcome-based education that are useful in defining the concept. First, outcomes are demonstrations of learning, not the names of subject areas, content, concepts, programs or themes. .These demonstrations can be anything from filling out a test sheet to a complex task such as organizing a recycling effort. The important point here is that if we establish meaningful goals and outcomes for education and we want students to demonstrate that they have accomplished them, we will have to go well beyond the traditional approach to teaching, learning and assessment. The outcome-based approach to learning is already evident in many gifted and talented classrooms, yet able learners spend most of their school time in the regular classroom. It is from this vantage point that we can see the benefit of adopting a performance-based approach to learning throughout the school and in all classrooms.

Outcome-based education calls for an entirely different organizational framework than currently exists in public education. Although it is not possible in this paper to fully explore all aspects of the reform initiative, parents and teachers of gifted children may wish to consider the following criterion when they become involved in planning for outcome-based education in their own school communities

1. Education as a Journey, Not A Destination

Outcomes-based education is primarily a process, not a product. Although it is critically important that there be common agreement on the destination, the emphasis must be placed on continuous engagement in the learning process. If this is done effectively, the result will be a accomplished graduate ready and eager to continue his or her lifelong journey of learning.

2. Continuous and Benchmark Assessment

Student performance should be evaluate for continuous improvement and educational outcomes should be assessed at regular intervals throughout the students' elementary and secondary schooling. These assessments should assist schools and parents in planning developmentally appropriate educational programs throughout the student's school years.

3. An Engaging Learning Environment

Teachers of gifted learners are well aware of the need for a learning environment that is sensitive to the developmental needs of the individual student, where students are active learners, growing through progressive experiences in seeking, organizing, and applying knowledge and skills in cooperative learning environments. Students should have continuous opportunity to grow intellectually and emotionally through dialogical learning, investigation of important facts, values, and concepts, creative expression in the fine arts, integration of mathematics into multidisciplinary scientific and technical

---

[3] Spady, W. G. (1988, October) "Organizing for results: the basis of authentic restructuring and reform." *Educational Leadership* ,46, 4-11.

applications, creative hands-on problem-solving, and collaboration with fellow students and teachers.

4. Family Involvement

Family involvement is essential to the success of outcomes-based student achievement. Parents of gifted students must be carefully informed on the progress of their child.

5. Qualified Teachers

Teachers have the primary responsibility for enabling students to achieve the goals and objectives of an outcomes-based curriculum and consequently need ample opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to implement outcome-based learning and assessment. High academic standards are needed in teacher preparation programs to insure that individuals entering the teaching profession are fully prepared in the knowledge, pedagogy, and learning assessment techniques needed to teach successfully in an outcome-based system. Like many of their colleagues who work primarily with gifted learners, all teachers must demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to foster active learning, teach higher-order thinking, and teach cross-disciplinary subjects in an integrated learning environment.

6. State of the Art Facilities

If students are to achieve the necessary proficiency in integrated applications of knowledge and higher-order problem solving, they need access to technical support systems including multimedia computers and school libraries that have electronic on-line library circulation systems and on-line data bases and communication linkages, and other state-of-the-art resources as they are developed.

9. School Governance

It is not likely that the goals of outcomes-based education will be achieved unless there is a change in the way schools are governed. Many teachers feel left out of school policy decisions that directly affect what goes on in their classroom. School administrators are likewise frustrated with the need to comply with outside policies and mandates that stand in the way of school performance. An increase in the local authority of school-based professionals in areas such as budget, personnel and curriculum is necessary. School districts need to engage in strategic planning and evaluation for the purpose of achieving higher levels of educational outcomes.

OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION IN PENNSYLVANIA[4]

What do we, as their advocates, want gifted and talented students to become as they travel through and complete their education? I believe that our thoughtful and collective response to this question may be found in Section 5.201 of Pennsylvania Chapter 5 Regulations These regulations state that public schools should educate all students to assume responsible adult roles as citizens, family members, workers and lifelong learners and prepare them to be:

1. High Academic Achievers.
2. Self-Directed, Life-long Learners.
3. Responsible, Involved Citizens.
4. Collaborative, High-Quality Contributors to the Economic and Cultural Life of Their Communities.
5. Adaptive Users of Advanced Technologies.
6. Concerned Stewards of the Global Environment.
7. Healthy, Continuously Developing Individuals.
8. Caring, Supportive Family & Community Members.

The common goals of the new regulations propose that public schools should help students (1) develop self worth and information and thinking skills; (2) encourage students to learn independently and collaboratively; (3) prepare students to adapt to change; (4) teach students the importance of ethical judgment; and (5) convey to students the need for honesty, responsibility, and tolerance.

Chapter 5 includes 53 student learner outcomes that describe the skills and abilities which students will be expected to demonstrate before graduating from a public schools. Schools have the option of adding additional outcomes suitable to the needs of students in their community. Chapter 5 requires that the local school district develop transitional outcomes and assessments to mark student progress from one educational level to another. The local school district is expected in their strategic plans to explain how the outcomes will be taught and assessed; the assessment plan must provide for authentic and varied assessment including student portfolios and high school projects. It is important to note that Chapter 5 stipulates that the district's strategic plan be developed with input from the community.

---

4 This section of the paper borrows freely from the training package developed by the Southeastern Teacher Leadership Center for the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Examples of Pennsylvania Learner Outcomes

Communications: All students compose and make oral presentations for each cognitive area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe

Mathematics: All students formulate and solve problems and communicate the mathematical processes used and the reasons for using them.

Science and Technology: All students evaluate advantages, disadvantages, and ethical considerations associated with the impact of science and technology on current and future life.

Environment and Ecology: All students evaluate the implications of finite natural resources and the need for conservation, sustainable agricultural development and stewardship of the environment.

Citizenship: All students develop and defend positions on current issues confronting the United States and other nations, conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations.

Arts and Humanities: All students produce, perform or exhibit their work in the visual arts, music, dance or theater, and describe the meaning their work has for them.

Career Education and Work: All students assess how changes in society, technology, government and the economy affect individuals and their careers and require them to continue learning.

Wellness and Fitness: All students develop leadership skills and the ability to work cooperatively in team sports or other developmentally appropriate group activities.

Home Economics: All students students demonstrate their knowledge of principles of consumer behavior as a foundation for managing available resources to provide for personal and family needs.

Personal, Family, and Community Living: All students develop interpersonal communication, decision-making, coping and evaluation skills and apply them to personal, family and community living.

Appreciating and Understanding Others: All students explore and articulate, in writing and speech, the similarities and differences among varied cultural values and the contributions of diverse cultural groups, including groups to which they belong.

The Strategic Plan

Every school district is required to develop and submit a strategic plan to the Department of Education every six years. The strategic plan includes:

(1) A mission statement
(2) a list of school district goals
(3) a list of student outcomes consistent with state outcomes including transitional outcomes.
(4) The Planned courses and instructional practices to be used
(5) An assessment plan designed to determine degree to which the outcomes have been achieved.
(6) Plans for professional development related to the achievement of learner outcomes.
(7) A description of how the school district is organized to achieve the learner outcomes.
(8) A description of personnel, library, classroom and other resources the school district plans to devote to the achievement of outcomes.
(9) A description of the process used to develop strategic plan, including a list of persons involved in the process.

The last component in the strategic plan should be considered an open invitation for parents and advocates of able learners to become involved in the planning process.

There are a couple of aspects of the Chapter 5 regulations that may have special interest to gifted and talented students. For example, options for achieving student learner outcomes include the opportunity for regularly enrolled students to demonstrate achievement of student learning outcomes by successfully completing an assessment, regardless of the instructional time spent, under procedures and policies established by the superintendent and the board of school directors. Students may demonstrate achievement of student learning outcomes through community service, correspondence study, attendance at summer school, weekend classes, study at summer camp, work experiences and educational travel under established procedures and policies. The regulations also stipulate that high school students enrolled in an accredited institution of higher education may receive credit for college courses. Students may also leave high school prior to senior year to attend accredited institutions on a full time basis.

OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION AND THE GIFTED LEARNER

Proponents of outcome-based education presume that stakeholders are generally dissatisfied with the current system when in fact many parents and teachers are satisfied and resistant to any major change.[5] The assumptions of

outcomes-based education also suggest that community consensus on graduation outcomes will prevail. As compelling as outcomes-based education may be, the history of school reform provides a telling story of well-intentioned restructuring initiatives that failed because of politics or lack of politics. In order for Pennsylvania's new outcome-based education system to be in the best interest of all learners, including the gifted and talented students, it will need to be carried out through a process of stakeholder involvement. This means that educational administrators and policy makers must listen to and address those questions that are being voiced by the various stakeholders, including advocates for the gifted and talented.

Gifted and talented students have much to gain from a system of education founded on the principles of outcome-based education, but they also have the much to lose if this "new" approach doesn't work. For this reason, advocates of gifted learners are wise to keep a steady eye on the progress of outcome-based education in their school communities. Although I do not pretend to have all of the answers, I offer the following questions as a way of organizing the discussion on what outcome-based education may mean for gifted and talented students.

What evidence do we have that outcomes-based education will work any better for gifted learners than the current system?

Although the is limited research on the success of outcomes-based education, there is a growing number of reports from schools and school districts that have implemented outcomes-based education. The best know of these school districts is Johnson City, New York where an outcomes-based model has been in place for fifteen years. In addition to high marks from school district educators and parents, a number of research reports have substantiated the district's claims of success.[6] The Outcomes-Driven Developmental Model, developed by former district administrator Albert Mammary, is used to coordinate and align a school's desired outcomes.[7] Mammary emphasizes the importance of administrative, teacher and parent support and offers a number of points critical to the success of outcomes-based education.

The number of schools and districts that have adopted the outcomes-based approach continues to grow as do the number of self-reported success stories.[8] Although this data is exploratory in nature, they provide a the baseline

---

5 Morgolis, H. "Understanding, facing the resistance to change." *NASSP Bulletin* 75 (October 1991): 1-8.

6 Nyland, L. (1991, November). "One district's journey to success with outcome-based education." *The School Administrator,* 48 29-35.

7 Mammary, A. (1991, October) "Fourteen principles of quality outcome-based education." Outcomes-Driven Developmental Journal.

for more empirical research. There has been very little attention in the research literature addressing the issue of outcome-based education and the gifted learner. One area that is emerging as an area of possible concern is the role of the gifted student in cooperative learning.

Who determines the outcomes and whose values should they reflect?

This question of what schools should be teaching - what students should know and be able to do - has been at the heart of a heated debate in Pennsylvania for over two years.[9] Some opponents of outcome-based education, for example, have argued successfully that schools should stick to the basics of academics and not teach values that may not be consistent with the values taught at home. The result of this debate has been a dramatic decrease in the number of prescribed outcomes coming from Harrisburg and an increased emphasis in the need for the local community to decide what they want their students to accomplish. To accomplish this challenging and sometimes controversial task, members of the school community need to engage in open and honest dialogue with a spirit of give and take. If these discussions are carried out with the best interests of the children in mind, I am convinced that differences can be reconciled and meaningful outcomes determined. Parents and teachers of gifted learners have an important role to play in this process.

What will result in terms of expectations if we eliminate tracking and require all students to achieve performance standards?

Outcome-based education in many ways means gifted education for all students. The emphasis on critical and creative thinking, problem solving and decision making, exploratory-discovery learning, and students reaching their full potential is what teachers of the gifted have been aiming for all along. Yet some teachers and parents are concerned that schools expecting these and other complex learner outcomes from all students will either lower the standards or invest a disproportionate amount of resources helping the less able student perform, perhaps at the expense of the more able student.

One of the most frequently expressed concerns has to do with the commitment of outcome-based education to uniform standards for all students. Complaints about this policy come from those parents who worry that their

---

8 Brown, A. S. (1988, October) "Outcome-based education: a success story."*Educational Leadership.*; Rubin, S. E. and Spady, W. G.(1984, May) "Achieving excellence through outcome-based instructional delivery.". *Educational Leadership*, 41,17-44; Sambs, C. E. & Schenkat, R.(1991, April). "One district learns about restructuring." *Educational Leadership* ,47, 72-75.

9 Several articles in the December issue of Educational Leadership address this issue.

relatively gifted children will be victims of reduced standards and lowered performance expectations as a result of an ill-begotten sense of democracy. There is the additional concern that serving the educational needs of students with varying abilities and motivation in the same classroom will result in the gifted learner not being challenged. These concerns are legitimate. Indeed a poorly implemented program might very well result in such undesirable outcomes. But need the commitment to all students as learners and a success-oriented program that affirms the right of each student to know what is prescribed as necessary to be a productive and enlightened member of our society imply lowered expectations for gifted learners? No necessary connection between outcome-based education and these fears exists. Advocates of gifted learners need to be aware of the "above and beyond the call of duty" opportunities for students to demonstrate the quality of their academic achievements. Nevertheless, voicing these concerns will assure a process of quality planning and implementing that addresses these concerns and makes sure they do not prove true.

CONCLUSION

This paper endeavored to provide an overview and rationale for outcome-based education in Pennsylvania with a special emphasis on matters of concern to gifted and talented students. Some, but certainly not all of the critical questions were raised as a way of organizing a meaningful conversation on the implications of outcome-based education for gifted learners. The point was not to contain the discussion or summarize all the issues but rather to demonstrate the important responsibility that parents and teachers of gifted learners have in joining the planning process. Outcome-based education comes at a time when support for gifted and talented education continues to decrease. Parents and teachers of gifted students need to ask the questions and schools need to respond with clear answers that ensure parents that their children, regardless of ability, will be challenged early on and throughout their academic careers with high expectations for success. In so doing, they will help shape the answer to the central question of this paper, What will outcome-based education mean for the gifted learner?